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Concerning PRAYER.



Rev. John Carter Smyth C.S.P.
The Catholic Hour



CONCERNING PRAYER

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CONCERNING PRAYER

Four addresses delivered in the nationwide Catholic Hour, produced by the National Council of Catholic Men, in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company, from November 5 through November 26, 1944.

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Why Men Pray -----	5
The Power of Prayer -----	11
The Habit of Prayer -----	16
Lord Teach Us How To Pray -----	22

WHY MEN PRAY

Address delivered on November 5, 1944

We are living in one of the great eras of man's history; and while we may be too close to its amazing events to perceive their full significance we are profoundly conscious of the greatness of the hour. Generations from now, our people will look back upon what we do today.

In this circumstance, when world-shaking changes are common place, and soul-testing tensions are part of daily living, it may seem venturesome to single out any one experience or any one hour as more impressive than another. I dare say, however, many of our people have suffered no more poignant hour than on June 6th, when word was flashed to the nation that our men were storming the beaches of Europe.

This was the supreme test of our arms and of our souls, the test of our faith in ourselves and in mankind. This was the very hour for which we were born. Yet our people received the invasion news calmly. There was no celebration, no outburst of enthusiasm, no sign of fear or depression.

The prevailing mood was one

of deep solemnity, with a profound intensification of religious feeling that expressed itself in a spontaneous desire to pray. Men and women of all confessions and of no confession followed in the ways of their fathers, and solemnly placed the fate of our country, our cause, and our men, in the hands of God. Churches everywhere were crowded. In schools, hospitals, court rooms, public buildings, theaters, war plants, stores, public squares, and other places where people congregated, men and women sought strength to meet the demands of the hour in prayer.

This spectacle of a nation on its knees will long remain one of the most vivid recollections of these tragic days. It was a spectacle that might have made many doubters reexamine their doubts. A few short years ago one would have thought it impossible that so many would turn so seriously to prayer. No doubt many prayed on June 6th who had not prayed to God in years. It is the best of all answers to the objection against prayer, that men cannot help

praying in the deeper moments of life. As William James puts it: "Many reasons are given us why we should not pray, whilst others are given us why we should. But in all this, very little is said of the reason why we do pray. The reason why we do pray is simply that we cannot help praying."

This story of how our people met a desperate hour in their life illustrates in a dramatic way a truth many of us have come upon in our personal life, namely, that while the instinct to pray is always in us, people do not generally begin to pray until they rather desperately need to. Prayer which through many years has seemed a pious superfluity then becomes a real necessity, and a man discovers what wise men always discover, that a life without prayer is an inadequate and ineffective life.

Life cannot be limited as some would limit it to mere bustle and energetic effort applied to the external world about us. Rather it depends for its ultimate fulfillment on the development of the world within us. There is no such thing as strong and fruitful living without inner strength of the spirit, which is the attainment of prayer.

At one time or another every one of us is confronted by situations that cannot be dealt with merely by aggressiveness. In a crushing grief, when we have lost one near and dear to us, mere aggression has very little significance. In an hour of temptation, when passion sweeps the soul, personal effort will not carry us far. In a world like the present, when catastrophe shakes the earth and the future is so uncertain, a man will not find a source of steadiness, or a foundation for faith and courage to carry on, if he has not enriched himself by prayer with inner spiritual power that will enable him to carry on when carrying on is hard.

We are living in one of the most revolutionary ages in human history, with such momentous choices facing us as will determine the lives of generations to come. Is it likely that we shall make the right choice that will carry mankind forward to fullness of life without the direction of that inner wisdom that comes from God through prayer? Man's life, like all God's creations, is subject to the discipline of law, and it can be lived adequately and effectively only in obedience to the law

under which God has placed it. And man's distinction lies in his ability to turn his thoughts in three directions. He can look down on the animate and inanimate world beneath him in the scale of life; he can look out to those who are on a level with himself—his fellow men; but the highest faculty at his command, from which the highest elements in human life have sprung, is that he can look up.

The trouble with many people is that they try to live their lives with eyes fixed on the world below them or out upon the world about them. They strive to master the elements which lie below them; they try to live reasonably, at least at times, with people about them. They forget that the glory of life comes not from the lowest elements which serve us, but from the Highest whom we serve; not from the things which we command, but from the things which we reverence.

The mystery of life is that it must be lived in two worlds—the one visible, physical, material; the other invisible, intangible, immaterial. Engrossed in the flesh, yet we cannot live by the flesh alone, but must rise into that other realm of the

spirit with its ideals, its faith, its truth and beauty. We must reach out to God, the foundation of faith, the source of truth, the font of all beauty. Until I find Him in the quiet of prayer I can know no peace, nor can my life have any depth of meaning. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

The difficulty that confronts many of us in this matter of prayer is that we are so tremendously impressed by the physical world in which we live. This we can see, and measure, and estimate, and its vastness overwhelms us. The world within is unseen, invisible, and therefore, in a sense, it is unreal for us. This is particularly true in our own country. We are so obsessed with the external world and what can be done with it that we tend to lose sight of the fact that our true destiny lies in the world within us rather than in the world without us.

That is why prayer has become unreal to multitudes of us. These unfortunate souls have set the limits of man's life at thought and labor in the world about them, thinking that they will thus come upon fullness of living. And when they have

worked their hardest and thought their deepest and achieved, in a measure, mastery of the world outside them, they are baffled by the incompleteness of the life they have fashioned. They have forgotten that the law of man's nature demands not only that he look down and out to attain his heart's desire, but that he look up—heavenward—if he is to gain the inner light that alone gives meaning and value to our thought and labor. As St. Paul expresses it in his letter to the Ephesians, man must "be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man;" that he "may be filled unto all the fullness of God" (*Ephesians* 3:16-19).

One of the major tasks of the Church in America today is to help our people recover and make effective in their lives the habit of prayer, if the nation is to meet the hope of the world that is placed in it. In this tremendous generation of ours there can be no doubt about it—we must think diligently and work mightily; but who among us does not feel that the more strenuous our thoughts and work become, the more we need the inner strength and guidance of prayer. Surely we are not un-

aware that our enemies in this present awful conflict—the peoples of Germany and Japan—have planned diligently and worked ceaselessly for a very long while, and with what disastrous consequences to the people of the earth. They have looked down upon the world beneath them and brought it into subjection to their needs; they have looked out upon society and painfully fashioned a slave state for living men. Their failure has been that they did not look up. They lacked reverence, which is the angel of the world; they missed the wisdom of the spirit which is the whisperings of God. They are doomed to failure as inevitably as all have been doomed to failure in the past, who have turned from the light of God's wisdom to walk darkly in the deceptive light of their own imaginings.

If a man has any maturity of life and thought, he must see that we need something more than mere busyness and aggression to make life issue in richness of living. Deep and strong personality is never created simply by thought and work in the external world about us. It must have deep interior sources of inspiration and truth. In every

great soul you will find something that goes beyond thinking and working; you will find an inner sensitiveness and hospitality to a world of truth and power higher than itself.

And it is not solely for the fulfillment of our personal destiny that prayer is so necessary. It is equally vital for our social life as a people, and for the life of our nation. This present world, war-torn and terrible, denies everything that the highest in man knows to be true. Cruel and brutal and unholy, so that we can hardly credit its insane depravity, it is as it were the incarnation of the spirit of anti-Christ. Yet in this world the spirit of Christ, which is the spirit of God, must be made prevail, else indeed we are all of us lost. And how shall this highest life be made prevail unless men in increasing numbers make their souls hospitable to that life through the exercise of prayer?

Now that victory seems assured, and the hope grows strong that soon the oppression of war shall be lifted from us, men everywhere are stirred by the hope that out of the travail of this war the peoples of the earth will be able to fashion a comity

of nations in which right shall be stronger than might, justice more enduring than injustice, and the brotherhood of man more a reality than an ennobling phrase. And how can this high hope find fulfillment unless the hearts and minds of men everywhere are reborn to the things of the spirit by the processes of prayer? How shall individual greed be tamed and national interests curbed and a widespread cynicism exorcised, unless men turn Godward and open their souls to the voice from on high. Only so shall our highest aspirations find fulfillment and the kingdom of God find establishment on the earth.

When we ask the question, why do men pray, we find the answer in that great cry of St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O God, and these hearts of ours can find no rest save in Thee." All men fundamentally desire richness of life, though not all are willing to make the effort to attain it. And fullness of life cannot be found save in that inner world of the spirit whose cultivation depends on prayer. Without interior resources to draw upon, life of necessity becomes a feeble and meaningless venture. And when

we look beyond our own needs and consider the society in which we live, we find the same pressing need for the cultivation of the things of the spirit. If there is to be born out of the dark womb of war a saner and more satisfying social life for

the peoples of the world, it will come only through the unfaltering faith of countless multitudes who believe that the ultimate in life is not in the mastery of the world about us, but in the submission of our spirits through prayer, to the guidance of God.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Address delivered on November 12, 1944

Several weeks ago there appeared in the picture supplement of one of the New York Sunday newspapers a remarkable photograph taken on the Island of Saipan, during the bloody battle that marked our conquest of that fortress in the Pacific. It might have been captioned with the title of these reflections, "The Power of Prayer." It pictured a great throng of our soldiers assisting at Divine Services—the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. The church was a torn battlefield, the altar a destroyed gun carriage, the congregation a group of battle-worn soldiers gazing with the rapt expression of men who were seeing the invisible in the very midst of death. These men had been in the valley of suffering and death, and after a brief respite they would go back again to a conflict from which some would not return. In this pause of rest they were seeking new strength to endure, and they were seeking it as men have always sought it in a desperate hour, by turning Godward.

They were praising God, adoring Him, supplicating Him through the most perfect form

of prayer that the mercy of God has given us, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. For the moment they were lifted above the dust and din of battle, into a Presence too lofty for the fear and hate and bitterness of conflict. They were nourishing their souls at the source of life. Even the dim reflection of a picture could not hide the fact that these men had found that which they sought.

It is no extravagance to say that the country stands amazed at the accomplishments of our fighting men. Their quiet courage, kindness, and simplicity, as they marched to swift and splendid victory, has challenged the admiration of the world. Only recently the Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, sent to our President, through Mr. Myron Taylor, an expression of his profound appreciation of "the fine example, bearing, and conduct of our troops." We have a right to think that a partial explanation of the character and accomplishments of our men is to be found in this, that for the most part they are fundamentally religious men. A prudent government

has thought of them in this wise, and, in this war more than in any other conflict in our history, it has made generous provision for their religious needs. Indeed there is no more interesting sidelight to the history of the war than the splendid response the men of the Army have made to these provisions.

Of course many of them have been wayward, profane, and at times even dissolute, but the fact remains that in the crisis of life most of them have had faith enough to turn to the fundamentals of life, and have sought, through prayer, strength of God. Some time ago I had a letter from a young Naval officer engaged with our fleet at sea. It was a fine, manly letter that revealed the character of the man. In it he said: "I never knew the comfort and power of prayer as I have experienced it in the lonely vigils at sea. As I go out on my mission of death, I have never loved people or things more. I have had my Gethsemani many times, and have at last by the power of prayer learned to face the prospect of my own death with Christian fortitude."

The instinct to seek inner strength through prayer, while more dramatically expressed by those facing death, has been

equally marked in those who wait and work and sorrow at home. These tragic years have brought to the surface a latent religious sense among our people that many imagined did not exist at all. Our concern with material success and indifference to religious worship, the decline of family life and the deterioration in personal and social morality, all have contributed to the impression that we were not a profoundly religious people. It took adversity and dangerous situations to shake us out of our spiritual lethargy, and in that awakening our spirits have instinctively reached out to God. We have witnessed a nation on its knees as it sought the protective armor of prayer for its gallant children.

Of course it is far better to have adversity force us to our knees than never to kneel at all. It is far better to come to God by the hard road of suffering than never to come to Him at all. But there is tragedy in the thought that so much that we now endure is the result of our failure to seek inner strength in the more favorable days of peace. Sin is the ultimate explanation of our present catastrophe. Not only the sins of our enemies,

but our own sins as well. Sins, all kinds of sin—hate, cruelty, injustice, greed—all these are the sign of inner moral weakness that stems from prayerless lives. Peace has its tragedies as well as war.

After all, we do live in a morally ordered universe, and we can no more violate without disaster the moral laws that shape our destiny than we can violate the laws of our physical well-being without suffering the consequences. God has made us to know Him and serve Him and to love Him. This is the end and purpose of all living, and without this truth to enlighten us, life has no meaning at all. Yet to know and love and serve God demands thought, reflection, and introspection, and this, after all, is prayer. First of all, then, prayer gives meaning and purpose to life, for it provides the answer to the primary question that rises in the mind of every intelligent man, Why am I living?

The trouble with many of us is that we are unwilling to discipline ourselves to the thoughtfulness of prayer. We are unwilling to face reality. We are always running away from ourselves, dreading the solitude

where we will have to think within ourselves, and so never really getting to know ourselves. And because our modern world is so full of machinery by which we can escape from ourselves, we seem for a time to make a go of it. Automobiles, newspapers, movies, radio, sports—anybody can keep from being still and so never have to come to terms with himself. At least, so it would seem. But unfortunately the hour inevitably strikes when we must come to terms with ourselves. This endless running away from ourselves leads out into lives so superficial and meaningless that we can no longer avoid seeing how utterly dreary life is when there is no deep purpose running through it—a body without a soul. We can see the hell inside those who have spent all their days restlessly running away from themselves only to discover in the end that their lives have no deep meaning, as God intends them to have. They sinned against the law of their being. They turned from the highest in them to lose themselves in the noisy distractions of the lowest.

The power of prayer is not only in its answer to the "why" of life, it is also in its answer to the "how" of life. If the pur-

pose of life is the perfecting of our higher nature, our spiritual selves, through the conquest of our lower, so that we become worthy of the knowledge and love and service of God, it is the part of wisdom to know the nature of the warfare which that conquest involves. St. Paul describes it in these words: "I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man: But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin, that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? The grace of God, by Jesus Christ" (*Romans* 7:21-25).

That is a graphic description of a universal experience. Every man realizes, sooner or later, that he is up against something in this terrific world and in himself, that is beyond his own strength; and to meet it he must have inner resources of strength that come from without himself. Elsewhere, in his epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul describes the malignant character of the forces that work against us: "Our wrestling is not against flesh

and blood; but against principalities and powers, against the spirit of wickedness in the high places. Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect" (*Ephesians* 6:12-13). Make no mistake about it, this emergence of our higher self into the full glory of spiritual living involves such conflicts as are beyond our strength unless it is buttressed by the strength of God; and prayer is the medium by which that power flows to the soul of man.

Just as around our bodies there is a physical universe upon which we live, so dependently that we create no power of our own, but only assimilate it—eat it, drink it, absorb it; so around our spirit there is a spiritual universe as real and as law-abiding as the physical universe with which the scientist deals. This world of the spirit, which is the kingdom of God, surrounds our lives, impinges on them, and is the condition of their very existence: "In him we live, and move, and are" (*Acts* 17:28). We cannot create inward power any more than we can create physical strength. We assimilate it. We fulfill the law of its reception and it comes, and pray-

er is the fulfillment of the conditions for our relationship with this spiritual world.

Those who pray habitually, inevitably find poise, perspective, and power for great living. They build characters that are magnanimous and strong; they achieve personalities that are Christ-like in quality; and they find within themselves deep resources of power that enable them not only to meet life worthily in themselves, but to reach out and minister to the needs of others.

Certainly there is no business so deeply and intimately our very own as this business of seeking wisdom and strength for life in prayer. The highest concern of every one of us is to achieve a rich spiritual experience that will give meaning to life, and undergird it with such sustain-

ing power as to fashion a radiant character that is the very image of God.

It would be emphasizing the obvious to say that today, more than at any time, the world stands in need of great and noble characters. It needs, above all else, lives that are spiritually strong and inspired, if the challenge of the hour is to be met. It needs deeply prayerful lives.

We pray God for many things in this fateful hour. We thank Him for the success that has blessed our cause. We pray that He will keep us ever in the shadow of His hand. Let us add this plea, that the habit of prayer may come to our people, not only in dark days like these, but in all our days, so that habitually we may seek power and wisdom at the Hands of God.

THE HABIT OF PRAYER

Address delivered on November 19, 1944

Human life at its best is a dependent thing, and all save the very thoughtless are conscious of this. At least we are conscious of it insofar as our physical existence is concerned. We create no physical power of our own. We draw it from the physical universe about us. We eat it, we drink it, we absorb it. We form habits of eating and drinking and breathing, and the regularity and skill with which we perform these bodily functions determines the physical fitness we shall enjoy. A good deal of the work of preventive medicine concerns itself with the vital function of physical assimilation.

However, it is not so clear to many of us that the higher life of man needs constant fresh infusions of spiritual strength if we are to know life at its best. We do not create spiritual and moral power, any more than we create the physical power to sustain life. We assimilate it from the realm of the spirit about us, through the habit of prayer. The reason many of us lead unsatisfactory, lopsided, and disintegrating lives is that we forget

this law of dependence that rules our higher life. We do not with regularity give thought to the spirit world about us, from whence comes spiritual light and strength for daily living. Save in some emotional crisis, when we pray instinctively, many of us do not pray at all.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, teaches us by word and example the supreme need of the soul for these habitual infusions of spiritual energy. The New Testament reveals Jesus as, above all things else, the man of prayer. And in St. Luke's Gospel, he tells us very plainly that if we are to find life, "we ought always to pray" (*Luke 18:1*). This may seem an impractical, if not impossible, admonition to follow, unless we know what Jesus meant by praying. Essentially, it means living in the presence of God, a directing of the whole of life Godward, so that even the commonplace action of daily living takes on the form of prayer: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all to the glory of God" (*I Corinthians 10:31*).

Many of us were taught in

childhood that prayer is the lifting up of the mind and the heart to God. By an act of the will we lift up our thoughts and affections to God, our Creator, to adore Him, to thank Him, to seek His pardon, to ask His blessing. This is the essence of the whole theology of prayer. As intelligent beings it is in our very nature to honor excellence; and from the splendor of His creation we come to know that God is supreme excellence. The intellect that denies Him its homage is false to itself. Adoration is, of course, the highest form of prayer—for the canticle of praise which ascends from the heart is a revelation of the soul's reverence before the majesty and greatness of God.

However we are not dwellers in the land where the eternal *Sanctus* resounds. We are not angels, but frail creatures of flesh and blood. And while the prayer of adoration is the most perfect form of prayer, since it is the expression of *selfless* love, yet, because we are dependent, sinful, creatures, *self* can not and ought not be excluded from our prayers. All that we are, and have, we owe to God, and the prayer of gratitude is our acknowledgment of this fact.

Sometimes, too, we are wayward in our living; and, when the evil deed is done, what else can we do but seek pardon of Him whose moral law we have transgressed?

Finally we stand in need of many things, spiritual and material—both for ourselves and others. And to whom shall we turn but to Him who is our God and our Father? Of course, the prayer of petition, without adoration and gratitude and repentance, is a poor shadow of prayer; but with these four elements it is a real enrichment of the soul. It gives us a background of power and hope and endurance.

Prayer embraces and fulfills the highest and deepest aspirations of the human soul. It takes the whole of man's life and makes every part of it subservient to the will and love of God. In the full life of prayer, even the body is not excluded. Of course prayer must be primarily in the soul; if it is not an act of the intellect and the affections, it is of no value at all. But thus grounded, it makes use of the body to minister to the soul, as when the eye, gazing upon the beauty of creation, lifts the soul to adoration of the

Creator; or it will use the body to express the sentiments of the soul as when we kneel before the splendor of God.

This rough analysis of the subject-matter of prayer, and the way in which it embraces the whole of man's life, is based upon the very nature of God and of man, and is, therefore, of universal application. It applies to all men whether in the Church or out of the Church, whether aware or unaware of any revelation of God to man. But, of course, it has special application to the Christian. For his knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, gives the Christian all the more reason for adoration and thanksgiving and sorrow, all the more confidence in petition, and in every part of his prayers a true ground of intimacy and personal contact.

At its best, prayer may be described as simply conversation with God, a communing with God, our Father—like the confidential talk of a reverent child who tells everything to his father, and, in turn, receives of his father guidance and strength. We find a striking example of this concept of prayer in that great book, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. From beginning to end, it is in the form of a

prayer, yet it narrates its author's history and expounds the most important of his opinions. Evidently, the great Augustine had the habit of doing all his deepest thinking in the presence of God so that his every thought took the form of conversing with God.

When we think of prayer in this wise, it is not hard for us to understand that Jesus prayed without ceasing, for He ever lived in the presence of His Father. And the admonition to "pray and pray always" does not seem so impractical as we first imagined. Of course, the virtue of prayerfulness, like every virtue, is a matter of growth and development. It demands time and thought and perseverance; yet without it we are like bodies without souls, we can do nothing.

The Savior does more for us than indicate with emphasis the need of the habit of prayer for fruitful living. He also traces for us the ways by which that habit can be more easily formed. For instance, He stresses the need of solitude for effective praying. All of us know there are times when it is necessary for a man to run away from the world that he may be able to endure the world. Who of us has

not felt this need? There are times when the world's sins, its stupidities, its noise and insanity, get to be too much for us. They obsess us so that we lose perspective, our sense of values alters, and confusion takes hold of us. Then we know we must get away from the world if we are to preserve our sanity. Jesus set us an example in this matter. We read, "And he retired into the desert and prayed" (*Luke* 5:16). And elsewhere we read, "Going out, he went into a desert place: and there he prayed" (*Mark* 1:35). Or, again, that "He went into a mountain alone to pray" (*Matthew* 14:23). This was a method of escape to which Jesus resorted many times to evade the importunities and compulsions of the world. In the solitude of the mountain or the desert He was alone, and yet He was not alone, for the Father was with Him. And in that High Presence the sins, the troubles, and the confusions of the world, die away. The peace and strength of God alone abide.

There is hardly anything we need more than a silent place where we can be quiet and alone with God, where the hate and bitterness of life will be lost in a Presence far too lofty for their endurance, where our feverish

anxieties and our inevitable sorrows will be soothed by the Presence of One who loves and understands. The world is crowded with the nervous wrecks of men and women who find frustration because they lack the inner light and strength that life demands. They never pause in solitude to find with Isaiah that, "They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength" (*Isaiah* 40:31).

Jesus also teaches us that there is a solitude of *time* as well as a solitude of *place* for effective praying. We read of Him, "That he passed the whole night in prayer" (*Luke* 6:12). And, again, "Rising very early, going out, he went into a desert place: and there he prayed" (*Mark* 1:35). The morning and the night are especially suitable times for prayer. There is more than solitude in such hours. There is the ministry of nature which soothes the mind and disposes it to devotion. The dawn of the day, with its unknown possibilities for good or evil, is a proper time to go into the Presence of Him from whom all strength and wisdom come. And when the day is done, and we seek repose against the exhaustions of its demands, there is nothing so appropriate or so

comforting as to kneel before God to thank Him for His blessings and to seek His pardon for our sins.

To the prayerless, who are conscious of the need of a power deeper than they now possess, might not an easy approach to the habit of prayer be found in a willingness, at the dawn and close of each day, to shut out for a little while the turmoil of the world and be alone and quiet with God?

There is another lesson Jesus teaches us about the habit of prayer. We hear of Him, again and again, taking two or three of His disciples away to pray with them, and, sometimes, of His praying with them all. The Twelve were a kind of family to Jesus, and He assiduously cultivated family prayers with them. He stressed constantly the value of cooperative prayer. "I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father" (*Matthew* 18:19). And, "Where there are two or more gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Matthew* 18:20).

How much good might come to

the homes of our country if this example and teaching of Jesus were taken seriously by our fathers and mothers! Things are not going well with home life in America. One out of every six marriages ends in divorce. Back of every divorce stands a broken home. And out of broken homes come the broken lives of children. The mounting record of juvenile delinquency is causing nationwide concern. These are evils far more tragic for the nation than the war itself. The family is the primary unit in the nation, and from it issues life or death for the people. A nation of broken homes and wayward children can not be a strong or enduring nation. What are we doing to meet this situation? We are proceeding, in the favored American way, to enact laws to deal with it. A uniform divorce law seems to be the highest measure of protection we can agree upon for the defense of the home against divorce. For the correction of wayward children we establish juvenile courts, call in psychiatrists, and work feverishly developing playgrounds. But none of these measures go to the root of the matter. The problem is fundamentally a moral one and legislation can do very little about it.

How much strength might come to tottering homes if fathers and mothers would get to their knees and bring the personal selfishness that is destroying their home into God's presence for judgment! How much protection would be thrown about children if the Nation once more returned to the ancient American tradition of family prayers and the devout reading of the Scripture! If we are to be a moral people, there is no substitute for prayer.

This subject cannot be considered a mere addendum of life which we can cultivate or ignore according as it appeals to us or not. The habit of prayer affects the very basis of life, and without it we can do very little

with our lives. The richness of individual life depends upon it. The sanctity and permanence of the home is conditioned on it. Our endurance and greatness as a people must be founded on it. It is the most fundamental subject that can claim our attention.

If we are prayerless, it is time for us to seek life where life can be found, at the Feet of God. If we know anything of the power and richness of prayer, let us seek, more fervently, a deeper prayerfulness because of the desperate need of the times. May all of us come, through experience, to know that prayer is, "the most powerful form of energy that the soul of man can generate."

LORD TEACH US HOW TO PRAY

Address delivered on November 26, 1944

So far as we know, there was only one thing that the disciples explicitly asked Jesus to teach them, and that was how to pray. This is the more remarkable for the simple reason that they were men who had prayed all their lives. They had been brought up in the Jewish tradition and from childhood on they had known the value of prayer. But now they were witnessing a new manifestation of the tremendous power of prayer as it revealed itself in the life of Jesus, and they knew by contrast that there was something wanting in the quality of their praying. We read in St. Luke's gospel, "It came to pass, that as he was in a certain place praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray" (*Luke 11:1*).

This awakened interest in prayer did not arise from any new argument advanced by Jesus concerning prayer, but from an exhibition of its power in the life of the Savior. The more they lived with Him the more the disciples saw the amazing spiritual power that became manifest in Him through pray-

er, and they wanted Him to teach them how to pray.

It is not enough to know that prayer is a principle of life so basic in quality that our lives are inadequate and incomplete without it; nor is it sufficient to believe in the amazing powers that prayers can release in us. It is necessary to know how to pray, to understand the objects of prayer, and the technique by which its purposes are realized. Like the disciples of old we must turn to the Master of life and ask: "Lord, teach us (how) to pray" (*Luke 11:1*).

You will remember that, in answer to this entreaty of the disciples, Jesus gave to them and to all the world the most perfect of all prayers, the Lord's Prayer. Its first phrase, "Our Father," goes to the very heart of all praying. It is possible to believe in God as the man in the street believes in the planet Mars. His confidence in its existence may be second-hand, but it is well-founded enough; only he does not propose to do anything about it. That many believe in God with similar in-

consequence, is clear. They agree that somebody must have made this world, and they are willing to call that somebody God; but they do not propose to do anything about Him or because of Him. Their faith in God is real enough but it is inoperative.

If prayer is to be a vital communing with God, such as sustains life and quickens conscience to the responsibilities of life, it must be conceived of in terms of personal relationship. The real problem for the earnest soul is, can God be thought of in terms of personal relationship so that we can commune with Him, be inspired by Him, be responsible to Him? Jesus answers this problem for us: "When you pray, say: Father" (*Luke 11:2*).

The attributes of God revealed to us by nature are infinite power and knowledge; and as made known by the intimations of conscience, they are judgment and justice. The God of nature and of the human conscience can be a frightening God; but God revealed to us by His Son, Jesus Christ, is a God of Love who is our Father, and we His dependent children. The love of God for His children is

the very heart of the Gospel. Because God is our Father and we are His dependent children, Jesus teaches us to pray to Him in our necessities: "Give us this day our daily bread," "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Thus Jesus blesses the prayer of petition and in His life many times sets us an example in this matter. Indeed of all Christ's promises none is more emphatic and distinct than this, that our prayers shall be heard and our petitions granted. And while the prayer of petition is not the highest form of prayer, as we have seen, yet it is a proper form of prayer, and for the prayerless it is possibly the easiest approach to the beginning of prayer.

Like every other great truth, this truth that God gives men what they pray for, has its limitations and explanations. But there is danger today of our attending more to the limitations than the substance, and adding explanation upon explanation until the truth is dissolved as though it were an accusation against God, a slur upon His dignity, and an insult to phy-

sical science. The prayer of petition does not supersede action but guides and directs it; it does not dispense with prudence, but makes good its deficiencies; and always, however pressing and tragic our appeal may be, it must end as did Christ's prayer in Gethsemani, "Not my will, but thine be done" (*Luke 22:42*).

Surely this approach to prayer, through our needs, has special significance for all of us in our present circumstances. So many anxieties and difficulties press upon us in these chaotic days that only a very foolish man can think himself able to deal with all of them. And there can be no doubt about it, that when a man has done his very best to meet the demands that are made upon him, and yet realizes his best is not good enough, it is a solid comfort to be able to turn in confidence to His heavenly Father.

While the prayer of petition is a proper and effective form of prayer, it is by no means the whole prayer. All prayer does not consist of petitions arising out of our necessities. Prayer is often so described by those who wish to bring it into ridicule, as if it consisted of noth-

ing but a series of demands addressed to God to alter our circumstances in accordance with our wishes. In the prayers of those who pray most and best, petition proper occupies less and less of their thoughts. Prayer at its best expresses the fullness of the soul rather than its emptiness. It is the overflow of the cup as the soul seeks to express its adoration for the greatness and the goodness of God. Prayer at its highest is simply hospitality to the Most High. As the Psalmist puts it, "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me" (*Psalms 84:9*).

Jesus said of His own entrance into the life of man, "Behold, I stand at the gate and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (*Apocalypse 3:20*). The Savior teaches us that God is not obtrusive. He bursts into no man's life unbidden; He is reserved and courteous. He knocks at the door to see if any one listening there may care to welcome Him. He teaches us to pray receptively. There are some things He cannot say to us if we lack the hospitality of attention; there are some things

He cannot do through us if we miss the whispering of His will.

Receptive prayer demands that solitude which Jesus sought in His prayers. We must be quietly hospitable if we are to "hear what the Lord God will speak" in us. This is true of every experience of life. The best and finest things we know are not clamorous, they do not shout at us. The loveliness of flowers, the beauty of a sunset, the splendor of a great friendship, of a great and abiding love, these stand at the door and knock to see if anyone within may be interested. Our finest moods are never clamorous, but our worst moods are. Our tempers, our passions, our despairs are noisy and shrill; but when the hour comes for the visitation of the highest, a nobler mood of quiet hospitality must be ours if we are to catch the still small voice that speaks from within.

This cultivation of a sensitive audition to the highest may not be attained easily or quickly as the baser things in life are. Yet it is about the most important matter that can engage our attention, for it goes to the very quick of life. Of all of us it is true that sometime or other we have had spiritual disaster;

some moral tragedy has befallen us, and as we trace our memory to the cause of that wretched time we know that it need never have happened if we had listened to the inner voice. To be sure, there was the urgent plea of passion or greed persuading us to what we did; but there was another kind of voice: our better selves, our conscience—divine mentors that always speak to us in quiet tones. In this sense the most fateful tragedies that befall mankind come because we do not give the highest a hearing. Receptive prayer is about the most important and practical interest that can engage the attention of an intelligent man who would escape the disasters of life.

In this disordered world of today, if a man is to keep his soul alive he must maintain a sensitive ear for the voice within him. In this unmatched time of change, when so much of the future depends on our wise use of the present, how great is the need for men who hear what the Lord God speaks to them. When the ugliest things are often the loudest, and that which men would have us do and think is dinned into our ears with noisy propaganda, there is des-

perate need of men and women, who have learned this deep essential art of the spiritual life, to pray to God in secret.

How beautifully the great St. Augustine expresses this need: "Let my soul take refuge from the crowding turmoil of worldly thoughts beneath the shadow of thy wings: Let my heart, this sea of restless waves, find peace in Thee, O God." How appropriate that prayer is for us in this great time. We all need so much an inner silence where we can hear the knock at the door of our soul, so that we may open wide its portals to give hospitality to Him who would come in to us and sup with us. We need an inner quiet where we can hear the still small voice that speaks to us of high motives in a world of low motives; of purity in an age reckless in its immodesty; of the kingdom of God in a social order that still crucifies the sons of God.

The power of receptive pray-

ing unfortunately cannot be brought home to the prayerless by any argument, for it is too deep for that. But its unquestioned capacity to shape fine personality can be seen daily in the lives of multitudes of men and women in every walk of life. Possibly, best of all, the prayerless will learn more easily and more vividly, when they begin to pray, the power they are shutting out of their lives. To those who would learn the secret of prayer, Jesus says very simply that God is our Father, that He loves us as His children, that He hears us when we speak to Him, and that when we are quiet and receptive He will speak to us and do for us the things that are for our peace. Yes, it is still true for all of us, whether we accept it or not: God stands at the door and knocks, and if any man hears His voice and opens to Him the door He will come in to him and sup with him and be with him.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from the address of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes at the inaugural program of the Catholic Hour in the studio of the National Broadcasting Company, New York City, March 2, 1930.)

Our congratulations and our gratitude are extended to the National Council of Catholic Men and its officials, and to all who, by their financial support, have made it possible to use this offer of the National Broadcasting Company. The heavy expense of managing and financing a weekly program, its musical numbers, its speakers, the subsequent answering of inquiries, must be met. . . .

This radio hour is for all the people of the United States. To our fellow-citizens, in this word of dedication, we wish to express a cordial greeting and, indeed, congratulations. For this radio hour is one of service to America, which certainly will listen in interestedly, and even sympathetically, I am sure, to the voice of the ancient Church with its historic background of all the centuries of the Christian era, and with its own notable contribution to the discovery, exploration, foundation and growth of our glorious country. . . .

Thus to voice before a vast public the Catholic Church is no light task. Our prayers will be with those who have that task in hand. We feel certain that it will have both the good will and the good wishes of the great majority of our countrymen. Surely, there is no true lover of our Country who does not eagerly hope for a less worldly, a less material, and a more spiritual standard among our people.

With good will, with kindness and with Christ-like sympathy for all, this work is inaugurated. So may it continue. So may it be fulfilled. This word of dedication voices, therefore, the hope that this radio hour may serve to make known, to explain with the charity of Christ, our faith, which we love even as we love Christ Himself. May it serve to make better understood that faith as it really is—a light revealing the pathway to heaven: a strength, and a power divine through Christ; pardoning our sins, elevating, consecrating our common every-day duties and joys, bringing not only justice but gladness and peace to our searching and questioning hearts.

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